

PASADENA STAR NEWS - October 14, 1992 (front page, across bottom)

EPA puts JPL on target list for contaminant cleanup

By Elizabeth Willson
Staff Writer

LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Tuesday that the Jet Propulsion Laboratory has been placed on the Superfund National Priority List, which requires the cleanup of environmentally contaminated areas discovered at the lab.

The EPA's list targets sites throughout the United States posing the greatest long-term threat to public health and the environment, due to actual or

potential contamination of soil, groundwater, surface water or air.

JPL officials believe pollution at the lab occurred during the 1940s and '50s, when the facility was operated by the Army. Chemicals such as freon, mercury, rocket fuel and sulfuric acid were disposed of in cesspools around the lab, as was the common practice at the time.

The lab has been anticipating being placed on the Superfund list for almost a year, since a 1990 study found the contaminants trichloroethylene, perchloroethylene, carbon tetrachloride

and 1,1-dichloroethane exceeding drinking water standards in at least one of the five wells monitored around JPL property.

Although the EPA and JPL will be devising a cleanup strategy together, the lab has already started working on a plan, said Chuck Buri, manager of JPL's environmental affairs office.

"JPL has been very anxious to begin planning to help move the process along," Buri said.

Lab spokesman Frank O'Donnell added that JPL is reluctant to jump too far ahead in the planning stages, lest the EPA ask it to redo procedures it finds

inadequate.

JPL spent \$1.125 million to help build a water cleanup plant after the 1990 well study, to prevent contamination of drinking water in municipal wells near the lab.

"We funded the construction of the plant to ensure that Pasadena had a clean water supply," Buri said.

But Buri added that JPL still questions the cause of the contamination.

"We're not certain JPL is the only source," he said.

Buri said JPL has no estimate of the costs or time involved in cleaning up contaminated areas

that any further studies may turn up.

"We're actively working with the EPA right now to establish the project scope and schedule," he said.

Since JPL is on federal property, it is not eligible for Superfund money, and NASA will probably pay for the cleanup.

Over 1,200 sites nationwide have been named to the Superfund priority list. EPA spokeswoman Lois Grunwald said the agency updates the list every year or two.

The cleanup process is usually lengthy, and can take years, she said.